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## Letter de Editor

I want to keep this short and sweet because I think that our readers would rather see the fantastic stuff we have for this quarter's issue.

Let me first thank everyone who submitted to The Circle. The turnout was actually somewhat overwhelming. I also want to thank all of the people on our staff for all their efforts. And finally I want to acknowledge someone who played a vital role in keeping the Auburn Circle a part of Auburn tradition. Thanks Felicia.

Enjoy,

Stephen

The deadline for submissions for Spring '98 is 5:00 PM, Wednesday March 18th

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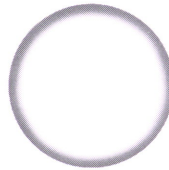
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# **Pulvis et Umbra Summus: We are but Dust and Shadow**

non-fiction  
by Risa Leitner

On August 15, 1996, the summer before my freshman year at Auburn University, my mother died of cancer at the age of fifty. My family and I were living in McMurray, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh, when Dr. Phrimer told us that Mom had six to nine months to live. If you'd told me as a child, or even in my first years of high school, that my mother would die before I left for college, I'd never have believed you. I had heard of kids losing



their parents, but I had always thought they were different, more vulnerable somehow, than I was. It seems we all neglect to consider that death may happen at anytime in our lives; perhaps that's because it's too frightening a concept. It is scary to believe that we are but dust and shadow; even though my mother lived two years after the initial diagnosis, her death forced me to be aware of how short life can be. Even more importantly, it helped me to clearly see my mom as a person, rather than just as a mother; now, I have her whole life to think about and analyze so that I can better understand how I want to become more like her.

I remember asking my mother after school one day how she could continue to do the things she'd always enjoyed knowing that she had cancer. "Risa," she'd said, I'm going to live until I die." I can't recall what I thought about after she said that, but I've thought about that day many times since then. I've wondered if I'll ever have the emotional strength to say those words as boldly as she did when I encounter difficult times in my life--will I have the courage to die in the same spirit with which I lived? To my mother, it was a clear and simple decision to live courageously and one that she rarely seemed to struggle with; Mom had always been a dynamic, head-strong and vibrant woman.

My mother had

more energy, spontaneity, and initiative than any of my other relatives or neighbors. My family moved four times to four different cities, and during each move Mom would tell me, "Bloom where God plants you." She exemplified these words by starting up craft groups, dinner parties, and luncheons among the women in each of our neighborhoods. Betty Jo Brooks, our next door neighbor in McMurray, called Mom the "marathon crafter." She and the other women in the craft group often joked that with cancer, Mom was finally working at their speed. Mom could make a party out of doing anything, even watching Saturday afternoon college football. Dad and I would sit around the coffee table in the den, munching on cheese and crackers, ham and swiss rolls, and salsa and chips that Mom would bring us on decorative, ceramic platters. Among our extended family, she was the initiator of activities and was able to talk anyone into doing just about anything with her. Each Thanksgiving when my mom's family would get together in Huntsville, Alabama, she'd get the women so excited to shop for sales at Wal-Mart that they would wake up at 5:00 a.m. to get there when the doors opened the following morning. During the times we shared as an extended family, I saw how Mom hugged every relative and made him or her laugh, showing them love and



acceptance. She was especially close to her twin sister, Kay, who also has the ability to make everyone around her feel special.

Looking back, I think Mom's vivaciousness grew, in part, from the pleasure she got from looking and feeling young, beautiful and sexy. Mom was the least modest mother among my childhood friends in Savannah. She'd walk around the house and even sunbathe in the backyard naked, and she'd mow the yard in a bikini top and hot pants. Every Friday, ever since I could remember, Mom would dress up in an ankle-length, flowing evening gown and cream, high-heeled bedroom shoes that had feathers across the toe, which she'd called "foof-foof shoes." My favorite gown was made of purple velvet and had a burgundy, sequined top. When Dad would get home from work, they'd walk around the yard with drinks in their hands, admiring the lawn, sculptured flowerbeds, and azalea bushes they worked hard each weekend to maintain. Later in the evening they'd eat a steak dinner on the screened-in porch, sipping wine and listening to soft music. Mom would frequently tell me how much she loved Dad and, even if I forgot everything else about growing up, to always remember that.

During the two years my mom had cancer, she always looked for opportunities to do special things for other people. Each week, Dad would take her to Dr. Phrimer's office for chemotherapy treatments. She'd wear a decorated sweatshirt and slacks with matching, flashy earrings and Chanel No. 5 perfume. I think she saw her office visits as opportunities to see friends, like her nurse, Sherry, and to serve and minister to them. One Christmas, Mom gave the medical staff a bag of homemade bean soup mix with attached recipe cards, decorated with Christmas stickers. When I consider the priorities my mother set for herself in her life, I realize how I need to look beyond the circumstances in my life and see the needs of people around me.

Now my mother is buried in Huntsville, Alabama, in the same cemetery where my Granddaddy Buttram, her father, is buried. It is an old cemetery that is full of trees and winding roads. Her tombstone is gray, polished granite, inscribed with "Kathy Ann Leitner" and a cross on one side. I've seen her grave twice since the funeral, and I still haven't been able to cry there. I'm not sure why I haven't, but I think it's because she still seems so alive to me. It's as if she'll still be waiting for me when I go up to Huntsville for Thanksgiving, letting me help her bake the pumpkin and pecan pies.

In truth, though, it is my Aunt Kay who makes my mother seem real and alive to me. She is my mother's identical twin sister and has always been a part of my life. She's been to all my birthday parties growing up and would always call our house every week to see how our family was doing. I am comforted knowing that if I ever want to know more about my mom's childhood, Aunt Kay will be able to tell me everything; they spent nearly every minute of their lives together, even during their first years of college. Although, to me, she doesn't look at all like Mom, she has many small features that my mom had, like her toes and the texture of her lips. They have identical voices, so when I call my aunt from school, it is soothing to hear the famil-

iar, Southern voice of my mother. Sometimes when I hug Aunt Kay, I close my eyes and think about hugging Mom - her body pressed close to mine, her head resting on my shoulder while her hands smooth down my hair. Then, for a moment, I don't have to think about how lonely it feels to be left behind by my college friends when they go home for Mother's Day, or how empty it feels to buy a Christmas present for everyone in my family, except for Mom.

Although most days I don't feel different from other college students, I know that I have matured and become more academically focused as a result of my mother's death. By watching how the other girls in my dorm act and by hearing what they say, I can see how I am more independent than they are. I suppose this is because I know I can't call my mom and cry about not getting asked to the homecoming game, or ask her how to hem a skirt, and I know that she will not be able to help plan my wedding or decorate my apartment. Instead, I know that my mother will always be a part of who I am, and this knowledge gives me the freedom and confidence to make my own decisions while I am at college. And unlike other students, when I get up each morning to go to difficult science classes, I am motivated, in part, by the encouragement she gave me to work to my fullest poten-



tial in school. Even how she died has affected the way I choose to spend my time. For ten hours every week, I research cancer in Auburn's pathobiology lab to better understand the disease that ended her life and deeply affected mine.

If I could gain one thing as a result of my mother's death, it would be my mother's eyes with which to see other people not as distractions in my schedule, but as special, valuable creatures with needs that I can meet. I want to have the initiative to start up activities and bring happiness to people. I want to have a dynamic, sexy relationship with my husband, encourage my children, and be an example for them. More than anything else, I want to be able to learn to say, "I'm going to live until I die," because now I know what this means. By seeing the ways in which Mom's life has had a lasting effect on my life, and on so many other people's lives, I realize now that we are much more than mere dust and shadow.

*bio: Risa Kay Leitner is a sophomore in pre-medicine. She calls Savannah, Georgia home. Risa was born in the back of a green Ford Torino. The headlines called her "The baby who couldn't wait."*





# A Picture of Jake

by Amy Quarles

Every summer since he was ten years old Randy had worked for Miss Alma Clements, mowing her lawn and running errands for her, always saving the money that she gave him towards something — a bike or video game or whatever it was that he thought he needed. She was an old woman, her husband dead and her only son married and living in Birmingham, sending for her by Greyhound bus every Christmas-time.

Except now Randy was fifteen years old, and he was tired of mowing Miss Alma's lawn, and the things he wanted to save up for now

were too expensive for Miss Alma's wages. He wanted to work in the snackbar at the public pool, serving Cokes to pretty girls in bathing suits, or at the movie theater. But his mother insisted that he do it one last summer, until his younger brother would be old enough to take over. "Randy," she'd urged him, "Miss Alma likes you a whole lot, and she's been so sweet to you. She don't have anybody else; it would break her heart if you left." So the routine of the past four summers began again, Randy dragging his lawnmower behind him, arriving at Miss Alma's house every Thursday at 9:30 a.m. Not too early in the morning, just as she'd told him, because Miss Alma liked to sleep until at least 8:30.

Miss Alma's house was old and cool and dark, with a porch that stretched across the north and west sides, so it had a nice view of the setting sun. Her husband had owned a drugstore while he was alive, and on the porch there was an oblong refrigerator, red with an advertisement for Coca-Cola painted on it. It had come from the drug store after it had closed down, sometime long before Randy had been born, and now it sat on the porch, an epitaph to a time that maybe his parents remembered. It still worked, and she kept little glass bottles of Coke and 7-Up in there.

Inside the house there

was a lot of fat, rotting furniture, beaded lampshades, rugs — old lady stuff. There was a TV set that didn't work and only one phone, a heavy avocado green one with a rotary dial. At Randy's house, there were two huge televisions and a phone in every room except for the bathroom. After Randy finished mowing the lawn and doing any other chores she had for him, Miss Alma would always invite him in. They would sit in the front room with the window unit grinding out cold air, and she would bring him a pimiento cheese sandwich with potato chips, and a Coke from the big refrigerator, so cold it would have little pieces of ice floating in it, and his sweaty hand would stick to the bottle. She would talk to him as he ate his lunch.

All her friends were dead, as was her one sister, and she would recount to him every detail of the diseases they had died of. Her husband had had a heart attack in his car. Her sister had died of a liver disease. "It was because she liked to drink some," Miss Alma would whisper to Randy, as if someone might hear. "That's why I just drink my Co'Colas now. Besides, I never really did like liquor too much — always made my legs hurt." Miss Alma had also been host to a whole list of ailments, including a frostbitten toe that had to be cut off, but nothing had gotten her yet, and she was proud of it.

She told him the same stories over and over again. She had a favorite story, which she would tell at least five times every summer. There was a small gold frame on the coffee table, and in the frame there was a yellowed newspaper photograph of a small ugly black terrier. He stood on his hind legs and was dressed in full Confederate battle uniform. The caption read, "Jake Clements, the family pet of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Clements, shows his Southern pride."

Miss Alma would show the picture to Randy and tell him all about Jake - how she had taught him first to stand, then to walk, on his hind legs. "I used little pieces



of raw bacon. Dogs go nuts for raw bacon, Randy." She would tell him how the dog had bitten her once, on the bridge of her nose, and she had to have stitches. She would tell him about all the costumes she had made for him — Santa Claus, an angel, a little three-piece suit and tie. If it hadn't been for the picture, Randy would have thought that she had made it all up.

One morning in July, the summer halfway over, Randy woke up earlier than usual. His father was still home, sitting at the kitchen table eating biscuits and sausage and syrup. His father was named Randall as well, as had been his father before him. He worked as a machinist, his brown eyes and the grease-filled creases in his hands as heavy and cold as the tools that he worked with. Randy's father had never been called anything except Randall, as if he had been born an adult, as if he had always been resolved to being a man.

Randall spoke with his mouth full, "You don't have to go to Miss Alma's today. She's dead." He took a slurp of his coffee, as if he had just said, "Looks like it might rain today," or "Have some breakfast, son."

"How do you know she's dead?"

"Neighbor lady that shops for her groceries found her yesterday morning. She came by to tell you this morning, but you were still

asleep." And that was it. At least, that would have been it except that two days later Miss Alma's son came down in a shiny new car, with a shiny blonde wife in the passenger seat, and they stuck a sign in Miss Alma's front yard that read, "Estate sale — antiques, household items, etc."

Randy walked over to the house, curious about Miss Alma's son and his wife more than anything else. The summer was hotter than it had ever been, and it was hard to breathe even without the stench of gasoline and rotten grass that usually followed him. The wife sat on the front porch smoking long menthol cigarettes, taking money from people and tucking it away into a cigar box. The son was helping people load Miss Alma's stuff into their cars.

They said nothing to Randy as he walked past them into the house. Everything had a price on it, even the plastic mini blinds in the bathroom. It all looked different without Miss Alma and her "Co-Colas" and cheese sandwiches. Randy walked through every room, darker now because someone had had the power shut off, reading the prices on everything.

On the dining room table there was a battered cardboard box, the words "These items free" scrawled on it in magic marker. Inside there was a bunch of random stuff — some bobby pins, old magazines, a dusty Christmas

card, a five-year diary with nothing written in it. At the bottom of the box Randy found the framed picture of Jake. He walked outside, carrying it, and watched from the porch as Miss Alma's son helped a portly man in paint-splattered jeans load the huge broken TV set into a white pickup truck. Randy turned to the wife and said, "I just want this picture," his voice coming out loud and almost rude sounding. "Fine, honey, its free," the wife said through her cigarette and her pink lipstick. She continued sorting money with her clawed and jewelled fingers.

Randy looked out at Miss Alma's green, green lawn, at the son's sweating face, and thought, "They don't know. They don't even know me, who I am." He put the picture of Jake in his pocket, walked down the porch stairs through the yard and into the street. He went home.

*bio: Amy Quarles says, "I am a junior in English. My dog runs around in the nude."*

# The Jungle Bug Dance

by Wren Doggett

Entranced with jiggly - joggly, spasmodic legs  
a chubby knuckled,  
opened eye  
baby boy  
wraps his mighty little hand  
around a wood case.  
Open and close  
the nut container  
of the black headed,  
red and white spotted  
Jungle Bug Toy.  
That baby's swelling giggles  
invites a game of  
"It's mine  
but you can see."  
Open it slowly, lowly...  
How does it jiggle and joggle like that?  
And the rhythm of the room  
spurts through those legs.  
With new found  
fluttering freedom,  
the surprising, dancing  
Jungle Bug Toy  
leaps into living.



# To never have lost

by Allen Davis

It killed her you know  
slowly  
creeping up and circling in  
darkness  
She smiled  
never afraid  
She told me these things  
when we laid  
in bed  
She whispered with hushed  
Anxiety of these  
Secretive truths  
She held me tighter on those nights  
She wrapped herself around me  
spinning me up in her  
dreams  
It seemed strange, it felt as if she  
were  
afraid sometimes  
that it would all steal away like  
the dawn  
cracks and glimpses  
weeping sighs and fitful looks  
but she always closed  
up  
but never gave up  
She fought but was  
always  
running over hills and valleys  
Never looked back  
dropped memories along her way like  
so much used luggage  
it tied her down i think  
She grew thinner, but it only seemed  
to frame her smile  
in a brighter way

Rain fell in crystalline sheets  
when i walked in  
She was crying on the  
floor  
a crumpled heap, when she looked at me  
she spoke only one word

“ “

And for all my pain  
My anger  
all i could think of  
was  
to  
turn away

*bio: Allen is a senior in Molecular Biology, "praying it  
will turn out for the better someday." He is "a  
person that not only trusts in his friends, but  
loves that he lives in a place where the wind only  
blows when it's cold."*

# Between the Thunder and Lightning



by Lesley K. Thompson

Brian's father had crumpled over the store counter like the soda cans he used to crush beneath his heavy boots on the store's concrete porch. The heart attack had been unexpected and had hit him as he'd been ringing up Sheriff Walters' Kool menthol cigarettes the same way he had every weekday morning for twenty years. Now Brian stood between his mother and grandmother and with his younger brother and sister in the shade of a large dogwood tree in the Higher Ground Cemetery and swayed slightly to the pastor's droning eulogy. His mother placed a black-gloved hand lightly on his arm, and he glanced up at her pale face. She managed a thin line of a smile and turned her glassy eyes back to the coffin before them. Brian knew what the coffin looked like. He'd gone with his mother to pick it out at the funeral home. While his mother had made arrangements for the funeral services he'd squeaked his fingers along the shiny, rich brown varnish of the lid and pressed his face against the cool blue satin of the lining, smelling the mixture of wood and material and dye. It was what death should smell like, he had thought. Not the stale, chemical smell of



the funeral home. Brian avoided looking at the casket now. He was afraid if he looked at it, he would picture his father's pasty face lying where he had pressed his own face against the satin. He focused, instead, on a rise just beyond Reverend Woodrow's shoulder where sunlight filtered through the leaves of an elm, making a gold filigree pattern on the manicured lawn below, and listened to the pastor's closing prayer.

"We ask, Lord, that you comfort Susan McLellan and her children, Brian, Samuel, and Sarah, in this, their hour of need with the knowledge that their husband and father, David, is now in your Holy Presence. Be with them, Lord, in the difficult decisions they will have to make, and guide them to your Will. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen."

A chorus of amens followed, and people began to make their way back to the cemetery parking lot. A few lingered to clasp hands with Brian's mother and offer their help. "...anything I can do at the store ..." "...need someone to help with the baby ..." "...anything fixed around the house ..." Mrs. McLellan smiled and nodded to each face, and when they were gone she picked up three-year-old Sarah, who had remained remarkably silent throughout the grave-side service, and carried her closer to the coffin for a final goodbye. Samuel stepped forward

to his mother's side, but Brian remained where he was, staring at the bright green, synthetic-grass tarp that had been placed over the hole dug in the ground and wondering who it was supposed to fool.

Brian hadn't been in bed long when his mother opened the door to his room, and a column of hallway light fell across his face. He pretended to be asleep as he used to when he was a little boy and his mother would check up on him before going to bed herself. He felt the side of his bed sink down slowly under her weight as she sat on the edge, and a peek revealed that she was facing away from him and towards the window across the room.

"I know you're awake, Brian," she said.

"And I think you know what I have to say." Brian kept his breathing even. "I can't handle this alone, sweetheart. We have a business to run now that your dad is gone, and I'm going to need you. Your brother and sister are going to need you ..." Her voice trailed off, and she seemed to pause to gain strength.

"We're all going to need some help to get through this, but we will. We're going to be OK." The last of her words came out in a rush, like she was almost out of breath for saying them. Brian felt the bed spring up as his mother stood. She brushed his damp hair away from his tightly shut eyes and kissed his forehead. A moment later the col-

# Jana Neff

She is Irish, German, English, Scandinavian, Scottish, and Native American. Her favorite toys as a child were buttons & dried blackeyed peas. She loves her dog & her family, she can't spell and she likes to talk to old people.

## Moore Warhol (watercolor)



umn of light slid from his face as the bedroom door shut.

Brian lay in the dark and felt his face heat up in the cool room. His anger surprised him. It had crept up suddenly from the hollow feeling in his chest and was now forming hard thoughts that hit him one after the other in no apparent order. No, everything wasn't going to be OK. How could she say that? Why was it *his* father that had to die instead of someone else's? Sheriff Walters. He was the one who smoked cigarettes, wasn't he? Brian thought of seeing the sheriff and his wife at the funeral with their downcast eyes, thought of his father on the cool, blue satin in the coffin. The lying coffin. The coffin that shone like new and smelled like new and seemed to say comforting things like "everything's going to be OK."

Brian's heart was pounding. Slowing. He anticipated each beat, counting them like his father had taught him to count the seconds between the lightning and the thunder to see how far away the storm was. One one-thousand ... two one-thousand ... It was further away now. Five one-thousand ... And the next storm could be counted away and the one after that, too ... Eight one-thousand ... and maybe eventually ... Nine one-thousand ...

*bio: Lesley K. Thompson is a senior in English from Mobile. She plans to teach high school creative writing while moonlighting as a fiction writer. The only soda she will drink is Dr. Pepper, and she plans to buy stock in the company as soon as she has the money.*





# Finding the Middle Ground

non-fiction  
by Bret Moore

For as long as I can remember there has existed in our society a sharp line between faith and reason, fact and belief. It's a problem

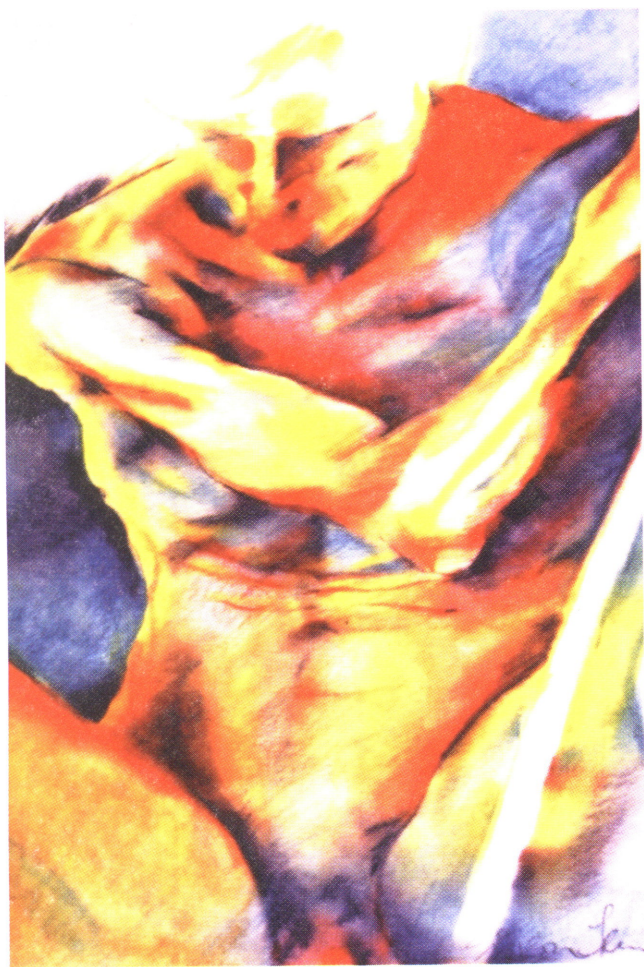
we've inherited from our Western traditions. We like to see things in black and white, with no shades of grey, no evident place upon which to compromise. It seems to me a strange attitude that we categorize things this way, confining things to either right or wrong, depending on their relation to our beliefs or our supposed place in the social structure. Ironically, our political system was supposedly built with exactly that sort of compromise in mind, and yet our society seems to shun it, to exalt those who take an extremist stance. Is it even possible, in our modern era, to find the middle ground where we all can meet, as citizens of the world, and, if only for a short time before we return to "reality," truly get along? And not just that, can we finally begin to make some progress?

Faith is an interesting concept, one which many people identify themselves with. Faith is that vehicle whereby we believe something to be true without direct evidence. We place our faith in God, in our fellow man, and in our leaders: that which we are told by those who "know" we take as the Truth, because we place our faith in their words. Scientists will say that with little or no empirical evidence we draw conclusions based on what we believe will happen, e. g., if I commit adultery I will go to hell. Of course, we've never been to hell, and we've never spoken with

*continued on page 22*

# Sharon Lewis

Sharon basks in the glory that is chocolate. She is inspired by everything to paint and to play in her food. Though some of her creations are outlets for frustration, most are fueled by a tireless curiosity of people and emotion. Her favorite long-term goal is to laugh at the world more often.



**boy**  
(pastel)

**i will  
survive**  
(watercolor)



someone who had a first-hand account of what it was like and why they went there. But we are told by those who "know" that this is the consequence of our fallen nature, our sinfulness. Those of us who have, in our own opinions, weak faith, admire and exalt those who preach about their faith the loudest, because "obviously" their faith is strong. We try to emulate them, try to come to the same understanding they have, try to copy their faith as best we can. As a consequence, there seems to be little independent thought and inquiry among the community subscribing to faith. Value is placed on those who do not question things which may shake or even shatter their faith. Is this attitude the best way to go about things, though? Untested faith would seem to be very weak, indeed. In addition, is such faith ever appropriate? Would you want someone to follow you without question, even if you knew that you might be wrong?

Reason, on the other hand, seems to take a different stance. We identify the scientific community as subscribing to reason, rational thought. However, this is just as much an extremist attitude as our conception of faith and the faithful community. Through reason, we draw conclusions based on what we have heard from those who "know" about a particular subject, and usually these conclusions are backed up by some form of empirical evidence. The question presents itself, then: is this evidence really *proof* (by proof I mean that sum of data or evidence that propels the theory into the realm of "fact")? Reason seems to tell us that it is, that the finite evidence we are seeing proves that A gives rise to B, that there is a causal relationship between the two, that there is proof of A because B exists and we've found X number of examples of some A going to B. And so we say that the evidence is indeed proof of whatever conclusion we have drawn. But in reality, such "proof" is merely suggesting that conclusion which we believe to be true, it is not proof in the strictest sense of the word. Strictly speaking, if one takes into account



the uncertainty principle, even the most unlikely event will happen, given enough time and enough tests. Therefore, one day you might find yourself falling upwards into the ceiling because gravity suddenly didn't work quite right. But you certainly don't think that is possible do you? John Henry Newman summed it up nicely: "To hold true without proof is to believe," and that is the realm of faith, is it not? Is a scientific outlook as inappropriate as a faithful one?

Would the middle ground between the two realms, faith and reason, be appropriate, and can they coexist? Can there be black and white together in harmony, unity, working together toward some ultimate goal of bettering not only the world we live in, but the Universe? And why do we insist on having a duality when it is, after all, the Universe? It's a mind-boggling dichotomy, a division in our human existence that would seem totally unnecessary. Reason, as described, seems to suggest faith. We make evaluative judgements on the evidence and conclusions provided and place our faith in the conclusions drawn from the finite evidence; accepting a hypothesis without any evidence can lead to disastrous consequences. Faith, likewise, suggests a reason-based search for truth. We make evaluative judgements on what we are told by others or by sacred texts and place our

faith in the conclusions drawn from the finite "evidence." To refuse to do so is to eventually fall prey to a very unreasonable doctrine (think crusades, colonizing of the Americas, slavery) and those who would use it to keep certain elements of society under control. Thus, I have compared the extreme cases, trying to emphasize the problems associated with each. What presents itself now is, in the words of Dr. Ken Walters, "appropriate trust" and "responsible science." By appropriate trust I mean a rational inquiry into one's faith, seeking the simplicity and peace that we all desire without being misled by fallible religious texts or leaders. By responsible science I mean the quest for empirical data and evidence while recognizing our limitations, that we can never understand everything, and understanding that faith has its place in our lives, certainly at least in our scientific inquiry. This responsible science also entails recognizing the dangers of certain areas of scientific discovery, and that some things are potentially much more harmful to the human race than they might initially believe (e.g., cloning of humans). These two suggestions have their roots in our ability to be reasonable.

That's what finding the middle ground is all about: being reasonable, not only with regards to faith, but also with regards to reason. We must come to terms with

# Matt Johnson

(watercolor)

## Untitled 1

Matt is from Montgomery, AL., and a Senior majoring in Illustration. His biggest fears include ticks and other blood-sucking things, falling, and people hiding in his house. When he grows up, he plans on becoming rich & famous by some insane stroke of luck.



our feelings in a reasonable fashion, deal with them and other people in a reasonable way, so that our lives can be reasonably happy. Clearly, in my mind, those who vehemently adhere to one extreme or the other are missing out on the uniquely human experience. We've had many religious and political leaders in the past who emphasized that being reasonable was desirable. The eastern philosopher Confucius suggested being reasonable, moderate, temperate, and this was mostly in regard to our physical existence. He believed that the spiritual life of the person, the person's spiritual well-being, would follow immediately behind their living rightly, reasonably. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, rejected a large portion of the New Testament because he found it to be unreasonable, contradictory, and these contradictions have been a source of complaint for as long as the book has existed. On the extreme, the preacher who stands on the concourse talking so loudly about how the various groups of students passing by are going to find themselves eternally damned is not thinking about God in a reasonable manner. He sees God as being entirely unreasonable, being arbitrary, and present only so that the human sense of justice may be satisfied (you wrong me, you are going to hell, and I'm going to send you there). Likewise, the student who stops and begins a shouting match with the preacher about how God is dead (he heard it on the radio) is being just as unreasonable. Adopting an atheistic stance as a reaction against the religious norm is not a genuine, thoughtful response to the question of God. It is just an instinctual reaction to oppression. Perhaps this preacher is reacting against what he sees as the corrupting influence of science in our world: the proliferation of nuclear arms, biological warfare, genetic cloning, drugs, pollution of the environment, the list is quite extensive. I have always felt that the preacher was wrong, but I never really knew why or how I should go about trying to change this

wrong attitude. I have known quite a few religious people who agreed with me about this, so I think it is reasonable to assert that some of us know that a certain unreasonable stance is wrong. We just have to be wise enough and experienced enough to be able to show others that it is such, to be able to show them the reasonable path to take, the way to the middle-ground.

Finding the middle ground between the two extremes of faith and reason is a difficult task. It requires that we stop reacting to the world around us and start responding reasonably. It requires that we elect politicians who think reasonably, responsibly, who don't just react to the desires of the constituents, but plan for the long term well-being of the human race as a whole. At the same time, it requires that we don't give them cause to behave that way, that we don't encourage them to only react to our whims and desires, which are simply the "easy way out" solutions to complex problems. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy, and so it is with finding the middle ground. But ultimately we will be better off as human beings for trying to find it, for in so trying we will succeed. The accomplishments of the human race so far are awe-inspiring and fantastic, but we still have a long way to go before we get to the Utopia of Sir Thomas Moore,

or to the Kingdom of God presented in the Bible. We can get there, if we take the time to turn our lives away from dichotomous thinking and back toward the unity we need to progress, the unity of understanding the universe through science and the unity with God and our fellow man. These things were not meant to be mutually exclusive, and the time has come in our history that we awaken to this truth and act on it.

*bio: Bret Moore is currently a Geology student with plans to focus on planetary geology and geophysics. He tries not to be serious all the time, but usually fails miserably. He welcomes any opposing viewpoints, or supporting texts, and can be reached at [mooreb1@mail.auburn.edu](mailto:mooreb1@mail.auburn.edu).*



# The Boy Knows of Magic

By Jeremy Gibson

Silver screen images stepping down from the stage,  
the organ piping in voice,  
footlights long unused linger for  
dim eyes.

He speaks the words  
backwards or sideways  
in his mind  
and the body walks through the seats  
passing row after row  
glowing with strange geometric shapes.

The boy knows of magic

He pays for the ticket  
and pays in the spells of the dead.  
For every rabbit pulled out of a hat  
there was one that had its throat cut  
by the man in the black tails  
with a pencil thin mustache  
and perfect hair.  
Hiding in plain sight comes with a price.

The hunter hunted by the nemesis stag knows,  
the conjure woman down on the plantation knows,  
the dreamer attending the wake knows,  
and the reader of the book of destiny knows.  
Everyone gets to choose the one way,  
right or left path,  
reality or reality slightly shifted.

The boy knows of magic.

The little girl plays her piano for Mozart -  
a tad bit late -  
and light springs from her fingertips.  
She knows the power of the hum  
and the sway,  
of the keys older than her great-grandfather.  
The audience can ride the wheel with her,  
summoning.

The boy can sit in the theater  
watching the musical mage pull  
trick after trick.  
His fellow patrons know where it comes from  
but he knows where it goes.

The boy knows of magic.



non-fiction  
by Emily Roberts

I have vivid memories of being four years old. Mom, Dad, my two baby brothers and I lived in a two-bedroom white house in a small town in northern Alabama called Tuscumbia. You may have heard of it. A blind and deaf lady named Helen Keller was born there. Our little white house had a mimosa tree out back which shed its filamentous, fragrant pink blooms annoyingly onto the side of my swingset with its yellow and green candy cane striped poles. For my fourth birthday

I got a boxer puppy I named Skippy after my favorite peanut butter. My family has home movies of me calmly pushing a plastic lawn mower in the back yard, and Skippy bounds up to me. Suddenly, this little blond girl swings the toy lawn mower over her head and charges at the boxer nearly twice her size until the dog retreats. This appears to be our game. Then I placidly return to "mowing" the grass until Skippy bounds up again, and again I wield the lawn mower at him until he submits.

The first tragic event I remember, besides the anxiety and fear I felt when my youngest brother, Joey, was born, is the disappearance of Skippy. I guess Skippy never really submitted to being mine, because one day he ran away. I have come to regard that day as the day I lost control of my life. I forfeited the tyranny of my lawn mower over to my parents, and soon they were to tell me that we had to move. Talk about upsetting the order of the Universe! "But where will we go?" I asked, not believing it possible to leave *my* room and *my* sandbox and *my* playground. Through the next few weeks I learned we were moving to a place far away from my grandparents and nursery school friends. That new place is called Houston, Texas, and Mom opened up a big map on the kitchen table to show me Texas' curious shape.

"Daddy got laid off from TVA, and he's looking for a job here," she said as she put her petite teacher's finger down on Houston. "But he might get a job in Sugarland, where they make sugar." It was then, perhaps because of the tenor of excitement in my mother's voice, that I began to anticipate the move to a state so wonderful they made sugar there. My innocence guarded me from any fear of the unknown; the entire world was unknown to me, how could Texas be any different?

We spent five independent years in Texas where I learned to love the flat, treeless land. My dad worked as a machinist for the power company, Houston Lighting and Power, and my mom was a math teacher in a public junior high school called George Junior High School. My parents got so homesick one steamy summer for family and hill country that we loaded up the U-hauls and trekked back to Alabama. I had come to accept the new order of our Universe; after five years or so in one location, we must move. I knew some of my friends had lived in the same houses all their lives, but the thought of that made my ten-year-old mind claustrophobic. I imagined all the experiences they were missing as they tromped through the same halls in which they had learned to walk. I had not yet come to appreciate the richness of such a heritage.

I was to face my heritage eight years later after our move from Texas back to Alabama. My parents told me that I had cousins in Alabama that I had never met before but I never quite believed them because those mythical cousins were as untouchable as Santa Claus. We returned to the land of the mythical cousins in the Double Oak Valley just south of Birmingham.

For those eight years we lived in a house that is owned by my mother's brother. It is a comfortable one-story, three-bedroom house; complete with a dark, damp basement. The house sits on a piece of family land. That means my great-grandparents acquired it when they tell us the land was cheap — and that for as far as you can see, the radius is probably close to a mile — only family lives there. The land was all my mother's aunts and cousins, brothers and sisters were distinguished by one thing — they owned land. Each made their own living in some humble way. The women were teachers and clerks and secretaries, and the men were mechanics and machinists and contractors. My mother's father is a Southern Baptist minister, and at a recent family reunion he gave our clan definition by saying, "This family is a working family. Never forget that." Because I was in my sophomore year at Auburn University, I wanted to assert my status as an intellectual by saying at that moment as we were all gathered solemnly around in a circle, "Up with the proletariat!" But out of respect for my grandfather, who is notorious for his lack of a sense of humor, I channeled the urge into a demure smile. I knew I was a worker as I reflected on the jobs I had held since turning sixteen; but still a deep, secret part of me rebelled at the label of a "blue-collar" worker.

As a young girl who played with her Barbies religiously, I longed to be like my pampered friends who lived in two-story houses with neatly landscaped, suburban front yards. My front yard was a vast rolling field with grass waist high. Across the street was not my best friend's house



with her car in the driveway waiting for her sixteenth birthday, but, rather, across the street was a forested Appalachian foothill over which I watched the sun come up every day. The eight years passed as I relished every trip into the city where I could walk next to the smartly dressed ladies and spend the money I had earned at my part-time job in the stores they shopped in. I parked my family's car next to their fancy cars and I knew that my parents could not give me those things. I didn't mind because that way of life was only fifteen minutes away. I dreamed that somehow I was like them due to sheer proximity.

Even so, at the end of my eleventh grade year in high school my illusion of being vicariously urban was shattered. My uncle paid a visit to my mother and I knew that something was bothering him because of the tender, sad look in his downcast eyes, which were usually smiling and happy. He took my mother outside for a walk, and then he told her that we had to move out of his house because his family would be moving back to the country. I remember my mother crying out of fear, not like thirteen years ago when she optimistically pointed to Houston, because we had no place to go. My uncle told her everything would be all right, but I thought he had no idea how hard my parents struggled to provide for our

family, but maybe he did.

Although we faced the challenge of this third move with doubt and limited resources, Uncle Dennis was right. Everything would be just fine. My mother's clan banded together to support us. My grandfather deeded Mom the land that would be hers when he died, and her cousins supplied the tractors and man power to clear the half-acre of forest land.

I, however, the child who had bullied the boxer and reveled in my lack of roots, was paralyzed with fear. That land was seven more miles down Highway 41. How could I ever hope to afford the gas for my trips into the city? And what boy in his right mind would want to date me knowing how far into the wilderness he would have to drive to see me?

As I stood on the red clay at the edge of the clearing, I watched my uncles guard the huge brush fire while the sun went down, and I wept like a baby. I felt I was being buried there, sending down my roots and giving up my mortal life to become one of the pine trees. And I was ashamed at myself for crying and for my helplessness and inaction.

This is the place where my grandfather as a young man had tilled his vegetable garden, and there on the hill between "our" land and the road stands the humble, patchwork-looking house he built for his wife and four

young children. Family and friends had had their start in that little house; it is an emblem of pride and self-preservation. But in my first year in my family's trailer behind the little house, I would hold my breath for the split second my friends would think that little house was where I lived as they drove up the drive way for the first time. For you see, it was really no more than a shack.

I did have friends visit me, and I even had a boyfriend the summer after I graduated from high school. Still, I counted the days until I could leave this home behind.

My visits back to that old place have given me my new perspective on how valuable my history is. Our land is beautiful. Nature-lovers seek such solace at state parks. I have yet to see a park that compares to the beauty I find in my backyard. If you choose your path down hill carefully, you'll find the winding, murky creek with its perfect stone overhang where my grandfather used to bathe. The creek's music sings of a past as pure as the crystalline sunlight that descends in shafts through the branches of the pines, and of a future which is ensured by the wealth of this heritage.

# The Lamb vs. All That is Hard II

by Christopher L. Sager

## I. Born Again

I turn seven tomorrow, and Mom says that I'm going to be baptized in the morning. I can't sleep, so I am getting out of bed to talk to God. My knees pop when they bend, and I am scared that Jason will wake up. He's still snoring on his side of the bedroom, but I stay still for a while. The room is dark, so I open my eyes bigger, and I can see the darkness better. I fold my hands to make a church. I can't see it, and I wonder if God can't see it either.

"God, are you there?" I whisper like the wind. He doesn't answer me, and I think that he can't see me in the dark or can't hear my soft voice over Jason's growling. I whisper a little louder, "God, are you there?" I break his silence by cracking my knuckles. The church sounds alive, and I feel like God is here, and listening.

"God, it's David Wells, I know that I should be in bed right now, but I need to talk to you." I move the church like a microphone, and whisper into the steeple. The steeple is touching my lips as I say, "God, I am going to die tomorrow."

I close my eyes tight, and I can almost see God. He looks like Jesus, but white all over, and I can feel the ghost moving in my heart.

"Mom says that I will go into the water, and

when I come out I will be a new person. She says that seven years is long enough to wait, and I know what she means. I try to be good, but I always do everything wrong. Mom wants me to be someone else, and I want her to be happy," I say. My eyes are starting to shake, and I know that I am going to cry. "I am scared because I don't know where the old me is going to go, and I am scared that he will be left in the water. The old me, this me, doesn't know how to swim, and I don't know if the new me will know how to swim either. God, I don't want to die!"

Jason shifts because I was too loud with my God talk, and I am crying because of death. I am afraid that Jason will wake up with anger, so I drop low onto the cold, wooden floor. I slide under my bed, the church still pointed at my lips. It is quiet, and Jason isn't snoring anymore. I know that God is mad at me for yelling at Him, and I feel like I will never learn to be good.

Hands form around my head, and Jason is pulling me from my dark, safe place. My church is broken, and I grab fast at the steel rail of my bed. I see flashes of bright colors in my mind; the reds and blues are the most painful. My eyes are tight, and Jason is playful with his punches, feeling for unprotected places on my body, and striking quick as an asp. My sobs are light, and I feel Jason's hand move away from my Adam's apple. I hear him leap back onto his bed, leaving me to my pain as quickly as he brought me to it. I twist for comfort, and finally become as cold and still as the wooden strips under me. I hear Jason snoring again, so I crawl back onto my bed. I cover my whole body with the comforter, curl up tight, rebuild my church, and wait to be born again.

## II. Litter

I am eight, and I don't want to get any older. I've learned that the older you get, the more living hurts. Everything is dark again, and I know that it is time for me to get inside the screened-in front porch. I climb down from the Dodge Dart's front seat. My toes dangle in the new light until I touch the dirt below me. The green car is tireless, and on top of cinder blocks. Mamma has been selling parts to dirty men to buy food and cigarettes.

Daddy left us again. Mamma had to move us back to this neighborhood. The streets are littered with trash and shirtless kids. Mamma calls them heathens, and they run wild in the night. That's why Mamma makes me come inside when it gets dark. I sit on the porch like an Indian, and watch the packs of bare-chested boys woo-hoo at the moon. Mamma sits out here and watches with me sometimes.

Tonight she is inside, and crying. I can hear her, but she acts like she just has the sniffles when we get closer to her side. Daddy said that he would come to this house tonight, and I hope that he's nice to Mamma when he gets here. He doesn't talk to me or Jason much, and I'm kind of glad. I've heard the way he gets to talking at people sometimes. It's better not to be noticed when he gets

hot. Mamma tells us that it is good to be little, and quiet.

Some nights I don't like being quiet. Jason is twelve, and the things that Daddy does hurts him more. He was quiet like me when I was six, but two years has a lot of hurting in it. He looks at Daddy with eyes like butcher knives. I can see Jason cutting Daddy up in his mind. Jason starts acting like a balloon when he's mad. He tries to hold it in, but when his face turns the color of fire I get moving toward a safe place. Daddy doesn't take sass from nobody.

When I get to my safe place no one can hurt me but me. I dig into myself with fingernails. My arms. My legs. My chest. The louder I hear Jason scream the harder I dig in. Every time I hear Daddy yell, I ball up my small hands and fling my fists at my cheeks. The louder he yells the harder I swing. Every time I hear Mamma moan I yank at my brown hair. The louder she moans the harder I pull. I feel the sting of my opened skin, the throbbing of my cheek, the tender knots rising on my head. When it is quiet I wipe my eyes, and slide out from underneath the bed; or pop out of the closet; or crawl out of the clothes hamper.

My safe place here is the backseat of the Dart. I hope that it is far enough away from the screams, and the yells, and the moans. I've already put my blue blanket in the floorboard in case I



need to stay out in the night for a long time. I stare at my safe place through the tiny squares of the porch's screen, while Mamma wipes away her sniffles to answer the phone. I listen hard, and figure out that she is talking to Grandma. Allen is sick, and sobbing in his crib. Mamma is telling Grandma that Allen needs to get healed up tonight. Grandma makes creams and drinks that make people feel better. Daddy told Grandma that she should wear a bone in her nose. I laugh to myself when I picture it, but it made Grandma sad. Then she got mad. Daddy is always getting people riled up.

I wish that we could move to Grandma's house. It is like angels live there. They don't tho — just Grandma, Tootie, and Shawn. Shawn is my cousin, and a year younger than me. Tootie is a good Mamma to him, but he treats her bad. When he gets mad I can see the devil in him, and he spits bad words at everyone around him. He laughs at Tootie when she chases him around the front yard with a thick belt. He's half Mexican, and fast.

Shawn says that he hates her because she doesn't live with his Daddy. Shawn doesn't call him his Daddy; he calls him his Amigo. His Amigo lives in Ft. Lauderdale, and Shawn gets to fly in an airplane to see him for Christmas and summer break. I don't know if that's where Tootie met him, but that's where he has been all this time. Shawn looks like his Amigo from the pictures I've seen, and I think that's why Tootie don't hug him so much.

Tootie brings a lot of men through the house, and that makes Shawn mad sometimes. Frank was one of the last men that Tootie brought home. He had lots of muscles, and he was nice to Shawn and me. Shawn liked him because he gave us nicknames. Shawn was Scrap Iron, and I was Bear Trap. Frank took us with him to watch sweaty men with big machines that tear down trees. The forest thundered under the clear sky. I liked Bear Trap better than

David, but Mamma told me to forget that name, and Frank. Frank stopped coming by on account of his drinking and Tootie's bruises.

Without the bruises Tootie is real pretty. She wears make-up, and fixes her hair and eyelashes. Daddy doesn't like Mamma to do that kind of stuff. When I was younger I would take naps with her. I would think about touching her soft skin, and put my small lips close to her sleeping face. I would just lay there thinking bad thoughts until I fell asleep. That's before I knew that they were bad thoughts; before I started going to church. God has been teaching me to control the Beast that is inside of me with a mighty yoke called the Holy Ghost.

I worry about Daddy because his Ghost is losing the fight against the Beast. It all starts when Daddy gets to drinking the Devil's fire water. He gets everybody scared when he drinks Jesus out of his mind. He gets scared too. Daddy swings at the demons that are in his head. Sometimes he hits Mamma on accident. He cries and says that he's sorry when he wakes up with a headache and sore knuckles.

Daddy doesn't mean to drink so much. Mamma says that painting houses makes him sad, and a couple of drinks makes him feel better. Satan is always looking for people with their guard down. Daddy gets mad at the world when Jesus isn't

there to tell him that He loves him. He looks for the women in the bar to tell him, and that's what makes Mamma cry the most. Daddy gets mad at Mamma for crying so much; he feels like he's not a good man.

Daddy pulls up in his pick-up truck, flashing headlights onto my face. I squint my eyes and smile because I can't help it. Daddy calls me Punkin, and I get up and open his door for him. He smiles at my help, and climbs out of the truck. He rubs my knotty head, and I grab onto his waist. I see Jason and his pack of heathens coming closer to the front yard. I tell Jason with my thumb pointed upward that everything is alright. Jason breaks from his pack, and walks into the dirt yard. Daddy reaches out his arm to Jason, and I hold my breath to see what happens next. I think of my safe place, and pray that Jason will give in to Deaddy's smile.

Jason walks past Daddy, and into the house. Daddy picks me up and carries me inside. He sets me down, and waits until Mamma hangs up the phone. Jason slams our bedroom door.

"I guess I deserve that," Daddy says, while Mamma sinks into his arms.

"I guess you do," Mamma says back to him.

I smile because I know that we will be leaving this neighborhood soon. Mamma and Daddy say that

they are taking Allen to Grandma's house, and ask me if I want to go with them. I tell them no, and walk back onto the porch. I sit here while they flash bright lights into my eyes as they pull out of the driveway. I crawl up into my safe place to get my blanket. I sit here watching the heathens circle the neighborhood, and I dig into myself one last time for all of the screaming, yelling, and moaning that I am far enough away from to hear.

### III. Dad's Cup

Mom sat Jason and me down at the kitchen table. It was a Saturday in early April, and the sun was stretched high across the Alabama plains. Jason and I were still joined together in laughter about the near disaster in our bedroom. The tomato-red lava from his science project was approaching the edge of the cardboard foundation, inching its way to the sea of pearl colored carpet. Jason was quick with his action, and saved the day — sacrificing three of his closest comic books. I wanted so much to be thirteen like Jason, instead of nine like me. Mom's expression pushed our laughter into giggles, and then into silence.

Her hands clenched tight around Dad's coffee cup. She was standing at the head of the table, her sundress dancing with the wind from the open kitchen window. She placed the cup hard onto the smooth, brown table to magnify our attention. The big bang echoed through the table, then inside my body. I held my breath, and Jason began breathing enough for the both of us. "This is Everything," she said, her index finger circled the lip of the cup. Slow circles, the kind that go on and on forever.

Jason stayed quiet, and I followed his lead. She looked us both in the eyes, soft and far away. There was a single river, streaming its way down the pale terrain of her cheek. She turned around and clicked loud across the room with heels.

Her right hand reached out from her

side, and fastened to the handle of the coffee pot. Mom clicked back quickly to the table, tilted the pot, and darkness settled into Everything.

"This is Mankind," she said, and I noticed more rivers running along the valleys in her skin. When the cup was half full, she walked the unborn far away from Everything, returning the pot to the stove.

Mom saw that I had rivers too, and she clicked double-time to my side. She knelt down, and said not to be scared. I smiled to show her my trust, and she put her lips to my head. She turned to Jason, lifted his chin, made eye contact, and winked.

"This is God," she said, while the pure white liquid flowed from the creamer container. God sank to the deepest parts of Mankind, accepted into the bitter darkness.

Mom traded the container for a silver spoon. The spoon threw sunbeams from the open window all around the room.

"This is Grace," she said about the spoon, while stirring God into Mankind, and Mankind into God.

Jason and I were hypnotized by the swirl, and Mom whispered like an angel that this was Heaven. I could see God deep inside of Everything. Mom lifted the cup, and blew ripples across existence. She reached into the glossy, white sugarbowl with her thumb and index finger, grabbing gently at sweetness.

She paused long, and then

said, "This is Daddy," and with a twist of her fingers he disappeared into Heaven.

*bio: Christopher L. Sager is a religion major who now teaches preschool in Montgomery.*



# Sharon Lewis

cosmic pear  
(watercolor)



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# falling off cloud 9

by Eric Reardon

I was riding on her encircling storm  
with my bourbon-soaked blues  
wind tossing my hair about  
and face puffy from drinking

remembering how her leaving expression struck me  
as I lay face reddened and confused on the floor

her lips were quivering  
a tear glistened down her cheek  
she slowly turned away

she would never lay eyes on me again

*bio: a sophomore in Business, he says: "I have  
accepted the fact that I am a blue-collar poet. I  
write to get it out of my head and heart and onto  
paper where I just might make some sense out  
of what I've experienced."*

**Untitled 2**  
(pen & ink)



**Matt Johnson**



(watercolor)  
Untitled 3



# When She's Asleep

by Elliot Karetny

When she's asleep  
you have to kick her  
to make sure she's not dead  
put a mirror in front of her mouth  
check her pulse on her soft  
throat with two nervous fingers  
But once she wakes up  
take a quick look  
because she's gone.

*bio: a graduate student in Zoology and Wildlife, Elliott  
Karetny is trying to figure out why he's a  
vegetarian. He hopes to return to Philadelphia  
and gorge himself on cheesesteaks.*

# Interview with Judy Troy



Author of “West of Venus” and “Mourning Doves”.

by Nia Denham  
and Susan Stone

*Judy Troy is now Alumni-Writer-in-Residence  
here at Auburn University.*

*C - Dr. Troy, I've gotta tell you, I loved this  
book [West of Venus]. How much of it is  
actually true?*

*T - Almost none of it.*

*C - So you never get naked and run  
through your backyard?*

*T - NO! No, I didn't! And actually, I'm  
not a doctor. If you're a fiction writer*

or a poet you can be a college professor without a Ph.D. It's getting harder and harder to do it, but your publications count.

**C** - *Okay, but I'm still more comfortable calling you Dr. Troy. Anyway, where do you get the ideas for your books?*

**T** - When I came to Auburn I was just finishing my first book, which was a collection of short stories.

**C** - *Yes, "Mourning Doves?"*

**T** - Right. Well, this was before Auburn, actually. the contract date was coming up and I still needed three more stories. I had these stories that I'd started a long time ago, and I thought I'd just go back and revise those. Then when I started them again, I thought "I just don't like these." In the meantime, I had this conversation on the phone with my sister — she and I had waitressed at the same place — and she told me that this woman we had waitressed with who had been a former topless dancer — her son had climbed to the top of the water tower and threatened to jump. This was in the paper. In the end he didn't jump, but my sister didn't know the rest of the story. That just stayed in my mind, so that was the basis of the first

story about Holly and Marvelle in the book "Mourning Doves" (when Holly's son goes up to the top of the water tower).

That's how it originally started. Then I moved to Auburn. After "Mourning Doves" came out I wanted to write a novel. I had written those three stories in "Mourning Doves" so quickly that I felt like I didn't really do justice to them. I liked those characters, and I wanted to go back to them. So I just decided to start a year later in their lives, but not taking into account the things that had gone on before in their lives, so it's pretty different.

**C** - *I was wondering if maybe you are "Marvelle" in the book.*

**T** - Well, I would say that there are bits of me in both Marvelle and Holly. I would say that I'm actually a cross between them. I'm probably more like Holly than people realize I am.

**C** - *I was so surprised, because I guess, being in English, I get the idea that everybody wants to write, well, you know like Academics who write books think that happy stories and love stories with good endings and hopefulness are like popular novels and not worth*

writing ...

T - Well, I think there's plenty of misery in there to classify it as literature. You know, because the themes are not that light-hearted.

C - *Yes, but the whole sense I got from the book is that you can get through anything, that there is hope ...*

T - Yes, well, interestingly when "Mourning Doves" came out and it was reviewed in the "New York Times Book Review," it was a good book review, and the only negative thing he said was that he thought I was a little nihilistic, and that what the characters had to deal with that was so hard for them was me! So I wrote him a letter, the guy who wrote the review, and thanked him for the review, and then I said "even the part I didn't want to believe, where you said that I tend to be nihilistic and what my characters are up against is me." I really thought actually that he had a very good point. I had already started this novel when I wrote him that letter, and sometimes I could feel myself being pulled into that. Then I would stop and remember him writing that. Because, what you want to do as a writer is tell the truth as you see it, assuming that you're a fairly sane person. So I think that if you're overly nihilistic or overly optimistic it's both, in a sense, not being honest. You want to be as honest as you can. So I think that, with this story, for example, there is suffering and there is illness and there is death, but that you don't have to live your life the way that Holly had been living her life or the way that Marvelle had been living her life, because in fact, there is a way out. I think that what you're thinking about are books that are frivolous, but if you looked at the way those novels are writ-



ten you'd have plenty to criticize besides just the story. You know what I mean? You know, the writing and so on ... It's just that there's not much to say about happiness. You're happy, so what's the problem? There's plenty to say about the ways in which we keep ourselves unhappy. If you want to try to write, and this is what I really try to get across to students in my classes, you need to write about something that matters tremendously. Themes that we're all drawn to ... of loss, of grief, of all the things we have to go through.

C - It's

*amazing that your characters can go through all the things that they did go through and then you're still able to give the reader that sense of hope.*

T - My life. Which was not like either one of theirs, but I live my life, and for 20 years, you know, it took me a long time to get out of it. And a lot of people don't. They stay there.

C - *Is there any reason that you write about this particular social group of people?*

T - You know, I'm writing a novel now that isn't, so much [about that group of people]. I think I write about that group because I grew up in a much more affluent way. My father was a pediatrician, and he didn't have tons of money, but we were still very comfortable, but I was not very happy, and I didn't like this town that we

lived in. I liked the town that we had lived in when I was really little that was a very blue-collar town. I really didn't want to leave there. You know, I was four, and I didn't



know much of what I wanted or didn't want, but I think I always had the sense that people with less money were happier, or were leading lives that were. The novel I'm writing now is about this 18-year-old boy whose mother is a high school teacher and his father has a little insurance agency, so it's not that they're really up

there, but they do have a house instead of a trailer.

*C - How long did it take you to write this book?*

*T - About three years, I would say.*

*C - Did you, like, dash out the story and then spend two and a half more years revising it?*

*T - Mostly, but even getting the initial story down, for that book it was really hard because it's not very plot driven, and I'd never written a novel before. So, it did take me a long time to find my way through this book. It's almost held together more like a short story than a typical novel because it isn't so plot driven, which means that it was really, really hard to write. I kept having to go back, like you make one change and then you have to go back and make other changes, and so it may have really been longer than three years in the end. I think what is surprising to students is that I didn't have a contract for this book until it was completely finished. And the same with the book I'm writing now. Unless you're John Grisham, they don't want to see your book until it's completed. Completely completed. But I think the other thing students find hard to believe is that you spend three years of your life on something that may never get published. What would keep you persevering through it? It's just the satisfaction of doing it — but it's hard. Hard but satisfying.*

*C - Do you like writing novels or short stories better?*

*T - Well, they're pretty different, and I like them both. I think that in some ways it's easier to write a novel than it is to write short stories. People told me that before I did it, and I was skeptical,*

but it's true. In a novel you benefit from the cumulative effect. The reader wants to know what's happening to these people that you're spending so much time with. You come to a short story as a reader in the same way that you come to a poem, you know, the stakes really have to be high. Every word has to be very carefully chosen. And I do that with a novel, too, carefully choose the words, but nonetheless, in a short story, like in a poem, any mistake, any inconsistency is immediately visible. The other thing is that the hardest thing about writing is coming up with an idea that's really going to work. A story that is really compelling and you are really into. So with a novel, you don't have to come up with a new idea for three years, in terms of what to write about. With a short story, you know, that's hard. So when I'm working on a novel, I find myself missing writing short stories. I seem to be going much more in the direction of novels. There are times when I feel compelled to write a story. Lately I've been feeling that a little bit. Like I'll miss working on some-

thing that can be completed within just a couple of months, as opposed to years.

**C** - *You know, I'm interested in the process of writing, and I've read that other authors said that the characters in their books come alive to them. Are your characters like real people to you? Do you live with the characters?*

**T** - You know how I would express it, that if there is a heaven, the truth is, I'd rather be in a heaven with my characters than with real people. You know, essentially they're you, to some degree, always.

They're your creations.

And yeah, they come alive in the sense that you try to put something in, say, Marvelle's mouth that she wouldn't really say, and you see that it doesn't really fit. What would she say? I call it "being the actor." When you're writing, no matter what you're writing, (well, fiction anyway) you're both the director and the actor at the same time. You know, you're directing in the sense that you're making this thing a coherent whole and you're acting in the sense that the only way to know what these people are gonna say is to sort of become them in your head. So in that way, you sort of

become them. I mean, they do seem to come alive, but in a more specific way, you have entered into the way they think.

*C - How did you go about bringing your book to the attention of the editors at Random House?*

T - You have an agent and he does it. The publishing companies are much less likely to read a manuscript that they get from an individual. The agent is, essentially, sort of your lawyer. It's fairly hard to get an agent. The way that I got one was that having had stores in "The New Yorker," agents contacted me because they can see that this is somebody they can make money from. But I didn't end up going with any of the people who contacted me. I had somebody at "The New Yorker" who was a writer help me, and he gave me a name of someone, and made an appointment for me, because the agent I've got does not see you unless you have an "in" somehow. I don't mean that quite the way it sounds, it's just that...

*C - Oh, I know. They probably have thousands of people contacting them.*

T - Yes, and he was the one I ended up choosing, and he chose me. I really liked him the best, and he was the one I talked to who said "you shouldn't think about money and you shouldn't worry about quantity of stories. You should just think about quality. Write the best stories you can. Don't be in a hurry." It was exactly my thinking about the whole thing.

*C - The stories in the magazines, you just send them the stories cold, is that usually the way it works?*

T - You still use your agent, but before I had an agent, yeah, I would just send



stories out to "The New Yorker," and that's how I got published. And so they did, they do read whatever they've got, because I didn't know anyone and I didn't have an agent. And to other literary magazines and so on. Now that I have an agent, he sends them to "The New Yorker." I don't do it directly any more. Do you guys know about literary journals? There's a shelf of them here in my office. See all the ones titled "Crazy Horse?" That's the one I edited, and there are various others. Well, you can find out in the library, there are books that give you the names of all the literary journals (not like "The Circle," because that's really an undergraduate magazine) but Auburn has "Southern Humanities Review," for example. They're almost all through universities, and you just send your stories out to them and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. I always tell people that literary journals don't really want to know anything about you, particularly, unless you've had other things published. You just send the stories out and say "enclosed is a story I am submitting for publica-

tion. Thank you for your time."

*C - So if somebody is just getting started, like the people who send stories in to "The Circle," the best thing for them to do, then, would be to just start sending in stories to these literary journals?*

*T - Yeah, although they need to be realistic that they will not be competing against undergraduates like themselves. Their competition are often college professors, people with Master of Fine Arts degrees, people with Ph.D.'s. I didn't send any stories out at all until after graduate school. Well, I was still working on my thesis, but I waited a long time. Otherwise, you're just going to get rejections and you're just going to get bitter about it, when in fact writing is not, well, there are no child prodigies in writing. You have to learn how to write. And what I always tell students is that the students I can't teach are the students who believe that they're as good as they need to be. Then you just back off and give up, because you're not the best writer you can be at 20, no matter how much writing you've done.*

*C - When you send something in to "X" journal and you're rejected, do you just*



*keep on sending them stories, or will they eventually begin to recognize your name and quit reading what you send?*

T - Well, I sent five stories to "The New Yorker" before they took one, and actually she would write little notes. And I didn't even know her name, it was just signed with initials, so I would then keep sending back to the same person. The little note might say "try us again," so yeah, sure. I have tons of rejections from when I was first writing. You just have to send it off, forget about it. You'll probably be rejected, but you never know... The hardest part about becoming a writer is the rejections. There were a couple of things that really aided me as writer. One was that I was completely realistic about how hard it would be to write and how long it would take me to learn. How I had that knowledge, I don't know. Probably because I never read anything that was bad. I only read good literature. I didn't read the best-sellers, I didn't read the romance novels. I mean, never! And so, my mind was filled with writers who are far better than I can ever be, which was great, and so I was realistic about that. And so I was able to be very hard on myself. And when I get stories rejected, almost always, I would say to myself (and it's a good idea, by the way, to read journals you're going to send stories to so you can see what's in there) and almost always my attitude was, "I'm getting rejected because my stories are not good enough yet. When they're good enough, when I write a good enough story, it'll be accepted." And that really kept me very sane. And I think that was right. I think that was the truth. And I think I was an insecure enough

person in a lot of ways to be able to think that way and be okay with it. What I mean by that is ah, I think what keeps, like now and then I'll hear somebody who's an academic in English say "Well, I tried to be a novelist one summer and just realized I couldn't do it." And that just makes me laugh, because a summer's nothing. But I think that for people who are very, very smart and very high achieving, the degree of failure that you're in for so long in writing, I think it would be hard for them to not lose hope.

**C** - *So should a beginning writer submit to The New Yorker" at first?*

**T** - Well, I mean, you can, but be realistic about it. And read what's in the magazine and so on. I just think you always want to try to be honest with yourself. And if you're fooling yourself into thinking that at 22 you're as good as any of these people you're reading, you're just in for a life full of disappointment. It seems to me that good advice is to just be realistic. Read what's out there and worry far more about what you're getting from the writing. See, I think there's two kinds of people who are interested in the

writing. One kind wants the pleasure of the doing. They'd rather do that than anything else, even when it's really hard and frustrating. The other kind want to be a writer. They want to wear the label on their forehead. And I feel sorry for them because you can't get good that way. And if your goal is always "I want to get published as soon as possible, I want to be famous. I want to be this, I want to be that, writing a story is too hard, and you're not concentrating on it the way you should be if you're thinking about what's going to come afterwards in terms of the fame or the fortune. So, you know, I wrote from the time I was young, like maybe sixth grade. Very privately. Never showed it to anybody. So I did it as a kind of survival sort of thing, I think.

**C** - *I understand that because I read as a survival thing.*

**T** - Exactly. And I think that when that's your attitude about it, that's great. But I think that when you want to become a writer in the same way that you want to become a famous actor or whatever, I mean, by "famous" I mean "popular" then you're going to be in trouble because writing is too hard. In fact, I

have a good way to judge, when I'm writing something, if I'm into it as much as I should be, because, if I find myself, when I'm writing the way I should be, where it's all I want to do and all I am thinking about, it gives me tremendous satisfaction, even though it's hard. It's only as an afterthought, after I send the story out that I will think "oh, wait a minute. If they take this I'm going to get paid." It literally won't even enter my mind. Now intellectually, of course, I know it because I've had stuff published before, but it literally comes as a surprise to me. "Oh yeah, wait a minute." And that's when I know. And the times I've written stories when I didn't have much money and was constantly thinking, "well, if I get this in..." every single time the story was not good enough. Every time. Well, have we covered everything?

*C - Yes. We were just wondering about young writers and if you have any other advise on how they can get started.*

*T - Take classes. That, for sure. Keep going to school. The thing is, as you get older, your writing gets better for a whole lot of different reasons. So, you know, a lot of people say "should you go to graduate school" and well, I think so. It certainly helped me. And what's the hurry to be in the job world. You've got your whole life to make. You know, it's a drag. So stay in school and get the most out of it.*

*photo by israel holby*

# New Providence Church- yard: A Visit with Mrs. Register

-For W. Raymond Register, 1936-1995-

by Fred Lochland McDonald

The sun was warm, the sky was huge.  
She spoke of you and cousins gone,  
then said that God seemed near  
in glow of setting sun.

And God was there,  
and you, my vaulted friend,  
in burr of sawgrass speech  
and depth of blue-gray eyes.

I drove her home,  
then stopped to fish  
where you once fished, old friend.  
And you seemed there,  
in slosh of striking jack  
a yard or two from shore.

I didn't catch him, as you know.  
Wouldn't have kept him if I had.  
For you'd have done the same, my friend,  
had my mom stepped round other stones.

*Fred McDonald wrote this as a farewell to his long-time friend, Raymond,  
who was an English department graduate teaching assistant colleague of his in the early 60's.*

# All the Days...

## For Gina Marie

by Emily Roberts

My brothers were your brothers  
And your sisters mine.  
I think we even traded souls  
Now and Then.

You led me by the hand  
Through green fields of innocence  
And Daisies, where lived our friends  
The turkeys, goats and rabbits.  
But did we come out on the other side?

We swam in the warm summer  
Muddy lakes of confusion  
And knew it was alright  
As long as we were within  
Shouting distance of Home.

We created songs to sing  
To the moon and the stars

To serenade their beauty.  
Do you think they now sing for us?

Pain was not our stranger.  
He visited us regularly.



*all the days...for gina marie*

Then in guises of scrapes and bruises.  
Wasn't I always the one to fall?

You always steady, sure, strong-  
Swift as the wind that  
Still blows through  
The Valley we call home.  
They served us Communion  
On that exquisite silver.  
Rituals of body and blood  
Bread and Wine.

May Goodness and Mercy follow you  
All the days of your life  
I would give you everything I love  
Lay it at your feet  
On a silver platter

*bio: Emily is a junior in Auburn's nursing school.*

# Traveling the Summer of 1993

by Wren Doggett

Nineteen pictures are housed  
under clear protective sheets  
in my photo album.

They are of nineteen homes  
I've known in twenty-two years:  
8 houses, 2 condos, 3 apartments,  
2 duplexes, 2 triplexes, 1 Ashram  
and a trailer.

Next to these nineteen structures  
with their doors and windows and closets  
lies a photo of the afternoon sun  
dropping behind a patch of daisies,  
its orange projected across a lake and  
a mountain range dipping to meet the water.  
A random campsite not accounted for  
in a tally of the places I've lived.

A home between homes,  
a remnant of a free summer without  
obligations and work and school.  
That summer I learned how amazing it feels  
to carry a home on my back along with  
everything else I need to survive  
on roads wide and narrow.  
Roads that carry me beyond.

# Inches

by Jade Pomeray

I have grown so much taller since he has  
seen me last -  
Since he has been away, I attempted to  
discuss, with another friend, matters  
normally too BIG to discuss with  
anyone but him -  
I helped her rise to a higher level -  
We sat in the night grass  
listening to the stars and  
watching the trees love on each other -  
I read to her some things I had written  
and she cried - that made me happy -  
She said that she could watch  
my face grow old before her eyes.  
At the same time, I felt the  
crevices in my skin grow deeper and  
deeper with each  
tocking second  
I know that at the moment,  
had I seen his Christlike face,  
I would have immediately transformed  
into a small child with belly protruding and  
arms open wide,  
And longed for him to nurture me  
for Eternity  
In his Arms of Life, Death -

Sometimes, as I am walking, I feel like  
twisting the light fixtures on the ceiling -  
and  
I know I can - without even standing on  
my Toes.  
He was always much taller than me  
and everyone else around him.

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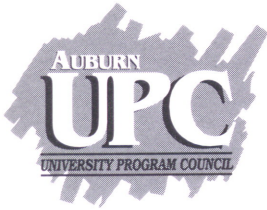
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